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ABSTRACT

This discussion emphasizes the need for a new perspective from which to understand the dynamic interchanges between the persons involved in the educational experience. Both teacher and student are urged to work together, simultaneously confronting not only the problems of their field of study but the wider human concerns of contemporary life as well. The unifying purpose of the educational adventure takes them out of their dyadic student-teacher relationship where their interests are made to conflict. (MJM)

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CRITIQUE

A Quarterly Memorandum

The Center for the Study of Higher Education

The University of Toledo

EDITORIAL OPINION

The literature of higher education has given increasing consideration to the theories of the developmental psychologists, especially to their emphasis upon creating within the college environment a milieu to enhance "self-fulfillment" in our students. Yet, while the person labeled "psychologist" has become the sought out authority for many of the questions of our contemporary society, a complementary discipline with an equally sophisticated and complex epistemology, that of philosophy, has tended to be overlooked.

However, the contemporary administrator and faculty member ought to recognize that there is presently a great deal of discussion concerning the teaching and learning which goes on in the undergraduate classroom. Co[illegible] administrators and faculties are themselves uncertain as to what is appropriate and effective within the classroom.

Our *CRITIQUE*, at this point, recommends for your reading and serious consideration the words of one philosopher. What he has to say is not necessarily radical, but his essay should go a long way toward complementing and making more understandable the words of others who are making similar comments from the perspectives of higher education and psychology.

WFH

From Tension to Community — A Fresh Approach to the Teaching-Learning Situation

John Smith*

One of the more obvious lessons to be learned from present-day confusion in schools and on campuses — especially as the aims and methods of education are concerned — is that we have grossly misunderstood the complex and subtle set of personal relations which constitute the teaching and learning situation. If a school or university is to be what it should and must be — a *community* of teachers and students — and if teaching and learning are to represent in any sense a common quest for those who learn and those who teach, we must attain a new perspective from which to understand the dynamic interchanges between the persons involved in the educational adventure.

The purpose of this discussion is to suggest what that perspective should be and to show how this new way of viewing the teaching situation can help to overcome the major defect of both our system and our consciousness concerning it. The truth is that creative education demands community and cooperation among the participants, but we have often succeeded only in breeding strife, tension and antagonism — student against teacher, teacher against teacher, student against student, and all against the "system." Whatever the final outcome of such a situation may be, one thing is clear, it cannot be the educational development of human beings.

If, as Hegel pointed out, what is most familiar to us is invariably the least understood, understanding education will be a major task on the American scene. Let us begin by considering the basic structure of the teaching and learning situation; for this purpose some logical distinctions will prove invaluable. Logic has often been viewed as an abstract subject, but he who sees in it no more than abstractions has overlooked one of the most important resources of modern logic for clarifying the most immediate and concrete human situations. This resource is found in the concept of *relation*.

The underlying structure of all situations involving human beings is revealed when we become

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clear about the relations in which they stand to each other, to their social enterprises and to themselves. "Brother *of*," "lover *of*," "teacher *of*" are expressions which stand for relations between persons and we must not repeat the widespread mistake of supposing that the individuals standing in these relations are "real" while the relations themselves are not or are merely "abstract." The all-important distinction, for example, between a community of persons engaged in a common enterprise and a casual collection of people such as a crowd gathered to witness a fire or an accident on the street is found in the very different ways in which the individuals involved are related to each other. The same individuals may be involved in both cases, but the difference between a community and a crowd becomes clear when we understand that the members of a community are united by an enduring purpose, a common past and a common hope for the future; people in a crowd are related in a merely ephemeral way and they have no purpose which survives their dispersal.

One of the fundamental ways of understanding relations is by noting the number of terms between which they hold. Some relations hold between but two terms and are frequently called *dyads*. Examples of dyadic relations can be found in all the actions and reactions characteristic of physical systems. One billiard ball strikes another and the second ball moves at a tangent to the path of the first ball on impact. A lever is depressed and then released to return to its original position, or water resting in the crevice of a boulder freezes and in expanding causes a fault in the rock.

In all these and similar cases two items are related by an action which has a *direction*. That is, there is first an agent or moving force and then a consequent reaction on the part of the object acted upon. The item acted upon must in some way adjust itself to the outside force. As we shall see, the one-sidedness, or in technical language the *asymmetry*, involved in many dyadic relations is a factor which may lead to serious problems when human beings are concerned and one person is put in the position of being acted upon and of having constantly to adjust to the behavior of the other. Such asymmetry is a major source of tension in the teaching and learning situation and one of our major problems is to find ways of overcoming that tension.

If we now consider dyadic relations as they hold in a multitude of enterprises involving persons, it will become apparent that, in addition to the asymmetries which may exist, there is another source of conflict stemming from the fact that dyadically related individuals frequently represent opposing interests. Illustrations abound; in the marketplace we have *buyer* and *seller;* in the law court we have *plaintiff* and *defendant;* in the world of industry we have *management* and *labor*. In each case, we have two individuals (or their representatives) who confront each other initially in some form of opposition such that an advantage gained by one member results in some sort of disadvantage to the other. In order for the buyer to obtain a "bargain" the seller may have to take a loss, and in order for the seller to make a "killing" the buyer must be gouged.

For the moment the specific details of these relationships are not crucial; of greater importance is an understanding of the basic structure of the situations in which individuals are related in essentially dyadic ways. Such cases illustrate what Royce called "dangerous pairs" because they involve conflict of interests which, if not brought within some framework of mediation, can prove to be potent sources of strife, wasteful competition and mutual destruction. Without a containing legal framework, for example, the competing claims of plaintiff and defendant cannot be resolved and some show of force or violence would seem to be the only alternative. The peculiar characteristic of such pairs or dyads is that the two individuals, though opposed in interest, are yet bound up with each other in some essential way. They are not related merely accidentally as two people thrown together in a crowd; on the contrary, they have essential business with each other, but the nature of their relationship is competitive. The two *are* together, but they cannot *work* together because they are antagonists.

Thus far our discussion of two-termed relations between persons has disclosed that these relations contain two sources of conflict. The two individuals may be related in asymmetrical ways so that one is agent and exercises power and the other is forced to react and adjust. The two individuals may be related solely in terms of mutual conflict of interest such that the satisfaction of one interest means the negation of the other. Both cases are fraught with tension and from these relations between human beings stems every form of contention, antagonism and violence possible for man. The central question is whether there is any way of escape.

The solution, curiously enough, has long been known, but it is doubtful whether the highly individualistic temper of modern life does not present an insuperable obstacle to its realization. The only way to mitigate and perhaps destroy the built-in

antagonisms manifested in the dyadic relations we have considered is by containing the dangerous pair in a community of some sort which means the introduction of a third term to serve as a mediating force between them. In logical terms, there must be a transition from a relation with two terms to one with three; dyads must give way to triads wherein individuals become related to each other, not in the immediate way of our previous examples, but in virtue of the fact that they become related to the same third term and thus indirectly to each other. Buyer and seller now become related through the mediating function of the market which both includes and transcends them at the same time; plaintiff and defendant now become related through the mediating function of the legal system wherein the magistrate seeks to adjudicate conflicting claims by relating them to a law equally binding on both parties.

Naturally, it would be quite unrealistic to suppose that mediation of the sort indicated automatically eliminates all conflict between opposed interests and issues in a state of tranquility. But what the move to the triadic relational situation does accomplish is the establishment of a tribunal, an arena, a forum within which conflicting demands can be weighed against each other with some show of justice.

The important point is the recognition of the triadic form of relatedness and the harmonizing principle which it represents. As related merely dyadically, the two individuals are forced to meet head on, as it were, with nothing between them but their antagonism. When, however, each becomes related to the same third term — some appropriate instrument of mediation — each is led to view his own interest and that of the other as something which does not exist in isolation but stands instead in relation to a life, a society, a legal system, an economic order which both parties share and within which the life of each is contained. Each member of the pair is taken out of himself and forced to view himself and his interest in relation to a larger order of life which he shares not only with his antagonist but with all other human beings as well. The move from dyads to triads means more than a change in objective relatedness; it leads to a change of consciousness as well. This new consciousness, as we shall see, is of decisive importance for the development of a new understanding of teaching and learning.

What has all of this to do with the situation of teaching and learning? The answer is that the transition from dyadic forms of relatedness to triadic forms furnishes us with that new perspective mentioned at the outset which can lead to a more creative and fruitful understanding of education insofar as that elusive enterprise is focused in the subtle activities of teaching and learning. We may now apply the results of our previous analyses to this specific set of activities, attending first to the student-teacher relationship when it is conceived dyadically and then to that same relationship when transformed by the introduction of the triadic conception of education and the community of learning which it entails.

If recent events in educational institutions at every level are any indication, there are circumstances under which teacher and student must be regarded as a "dangerous pair." For when their relationship is conceived dyadically, both sources of tension and antagonism will be manifest.

Each may view his or her interest as standing in direct conflict with that of the other as happens, for example, when teachers and students are in basic disagreement over the aims and methods of education or over the obligations and responsibilities of their respective roles. Explosive as this sort of conflict may be, it is not as serious or as fundamental as the other danger inherent in the dyadic relationship which makes its appearance in the form of the asymmetries previously pointed out.

If we attend to some of the images which have dominated the teacher-student relationship for some time, these asymmetries and their unfortunate consequences will become clear. The following represents four ways of conceiving the student-teacher relationship where the teacher is in the agent position and the student is in the position of having to adjust to an exercise of authority.

Teacher	*Student*
(1) Authority	(1') Subject
(2) Expert	(2') Layman
(3) Leader	(3') Disciple
(4) Learned	(4') Learning

In each of these relations the asymmetry is on the side of the teacher as the member of the dyad who determines the direction of the activity. As the bearer of authority, the teacher, especially at the level where discipline is a major problem, sets forth the rules and regulations and it is incumbent on the student, as one subject to authority, to obey them.

In older "authoritarian" conceptions of education, the authority of the teacher was not con-

fined to regulations and discipline, but extended to the communication of material to be learned. The student was expected to "learn" a "truth" the validity of which was supported ultimately by the teacher's one-way authority.

As expert in relation to the student regarded as layman or novice, the teacher exercises an intellectual authority grounded in knowledge and command of a field of study. As a layman in the field by comparison, the student is expected to adjust his own thought and opinion to that of the teacher functioning as the norm. Put in extreme terms and in the form of a limiting case, the teacher is always "right" and the student, when in conflict with the norm, is always "wrong."

As leader in relation to the student, the teacher casts him in the role of disciple out of which develop the imitative behavior and other marks of dependence which inevitably accompany the attempt to fit into a predetermined mold. Again, the adjustment required is exclusively in one direction. Essentially the same dyadic asymmetry is found in the fourth pair of concepts with the teacher appearing as one who is already in possession of something which the student is hoping to attain and the supposition is that if he is to succeed he must follow the pattern and the pace set by the instructor.

Before underlining the basic flaw in these dyadic relations, each of which makes a travesty of both teaching and learning, it will be helpful to note some examples where the asymmetry runs in the opposition direction and the teacher is cast in the role of the adjusting or reacting member of the dyad.

Student	*Teacher*
(1) Revolutionary agent who defines what is "relevant."	(1') Purveyor of "mere" ideas.
(2) Consumer who must receive a "cash value" education.	(2') Producer who must satisfy the customer.

Here the student appears in the first case as an agent whose business it is to transform society through revolutionary activity on the basis of a presumed knowledge of the information and the principles required for that purpose. By contrast, the teacher appears as a bearer of inert ideas which in themselves are supposed to be devoid of power and he stands under obligation to shape his teaching in accordance with what the student regards as relevant for his own purposes.

The same one-way relationship is manifested in the second case, which is in itself a pure product of industrialized society where education has become a marketable commodity. The student is cast in the role — partly on his own initiative and partly under the domination of the society in which he lives — of a consumer purchasing a product to be put to his own use and benefit. The teacher as the one who has, or is supposed to be able to produce, this product is required to satisfy his client with the sort of instruction taken to represent a cash value return to the purchaser.

Indeed, as the cost of education increases, the pressure on the teacher mounts to shape his instruction in accordance with the commercial ideal. I have included the two previous illustrations in order to emphasize the fact that, although the larger number of asymmetries arising out of the dyadic relationship involve the teacher as the determining member of the pair, the direction can also be reversed.

In the foregoing examples I have purposely overdrawn the relationships in order to make more manifest the deficiencies they represent. Some asymmetries will remain and indeed must remain even in an ideal teaching-learning situation. The teacher remains a teacher and the student a student even if, as I shall suggest, the two may legitimately change places with each other in creative educational exchange. If, for example, I consult a lawyer and wish to become his client, I am not asking to become my own lawyer and I would be puzzled if he acted as though I were the one to provide the knowledge and advice I am seeking from him. The asymmetry of lawyer and client remains. The same holds true in the educational situation.

However we may propose to reinterpret the relation between student and teacher, the two individuals enter into the relationship with a predetermined status. If, in the end, we should maintain that the teacher must continue to learn, i.e., be a student, and that the student must learn with such proficiency as would enable him to communicate it to others, i.e., be a teacher, the fact remains that the initial situation has distinguished the two and there is no confusion in their status.

We are now in a position to make clear the crucial defect from which the dyadic conception of the student-teacher relation suffers and which has

done untold harm not only in the thwarting of the true aims of education, but in the breeding of antagonism among the very persons who *must* cooperate with each other if they are to realize their common goal. Absolutely lacking in the dyadic conception is the crucial fact that the student and teacher are meant to be *working together* or to be engaged in a community endeavor. At the outset we spoke of the ideal of a *community* of teachers and scholars, but it may be that the precise meaning of that ideal will be lost if it is taken as no more than a piece of commencement rhetoric. Instead we must look more closely at what an educational community means and especially why it cannot be understood in terms of a collection or a sum of individuals related in merely dyadic ways. The basic idea behind every community is that all the members who belong to it are members in virtue of the fact that *all of them related to the same third term.* This third term may be simple or it may be complex almost beyond comprehension, but whatever its character it continues to perform the same unifying function.

Let us suppose that we have two individuals, *A* and *B; A* understands only English and *B* understands only French and they wish to converse with each other. As they are, they cannot accomplish their aim. But suppose we introduce a third person, *C*, who speaks both languages; the situation is at once transformed. *A* and *B* can converse through the community of understanding created by *C*. *A* can speak to *B* by first speaking to *C* who will in turn translate what he says into the language which *B* can understand. *A* and *B* are no longer separated and the impasse between them is overcome because each is now related to *C* who has created a community of understanding between them.

The principle involved is capable of endless and subtle variations; to overcome the tensions existing between individuals dyadically related, it is necessary to create a community between them by means of a third term to which each is related at the same time. This crucial term may be, as in our illustration, an interpreter who understands two different languages, it may be an arbitrator as in the attempt to resolve a conflict of interest, or it may be a purpose or cause which two or more individuals are willing to espouse and work for in a practical way.

The application of this principle to the situation of teaching and learning is both precise and dramatic at the same time. What brings teacher and student into community is the fact that *both are engaged in the same educational adventure.*

The complex purpose of this adventure is the conquest of ignorance — to discover what we have been, to discover what the world and ourselves now are, to discover what we may become and how we are to reach that goal — and it represents the cause to which student and teacher alike are devoted. The world to be known and the world to be transformed, the human beings to be understood and the personalities to be developed, plus the knowledge and wisdom necessary for the task constitute a common goal and a common challenge.

Both those who teach and those who learn are *simultaneously* attempting to meet that challenge and to work for the realization of that goal. From the perspective of the community enterprise and the new consciousness which goes with it, teaching and learning will now appear as functions or aspects of the total situation rather than as something entirely localized in two different groups of people. The teacher and the student alike confront the myriad mysteries of the world and human society as a challenge to inquiry and research. Consequently, the teacher is also a student who is still learning and the student is a teacher to the extent that he or she makes a contribution to that learning.

The details of the enterprise, though obviously important, are not as important as the new consciousness which can result from this new perspective. We shall no longer think in terms of the old asymmetries, as if the teacher alone confronted the world's ignorance and its many mysteries and, having arrived at the solution, had only to pass it along to a willing recipient. Students as well confront that same ignorance and mystery and while, in the nature of the case, neither their knowledge nor experience is likely to be as extensive as that of their teachers, they will nevertheless have their own ideas, reactions, judgments concerning that total reality which forms the ultimate focal point of all teaching and learning.

We shall not think of the student as the layman subject to the authority of the teacher, nor shall we think of him as a paying customer entitled to receive the commodity for which he has paid. As should be abundantly clear, such an angle of vision is confined to the dyadic situation where the community concept is lacking and the individuals stand opposed both in interest and role.

All of the failures, frustrations and tensions existing in contemporary schools at every level stem from the loss of a sense that education is a *cooperative* enterprise and that it requires a com-

munity of endeavor. Modern industrial society has destroyed this sense by confusing community with organization. Organization means clear differentiation of role and functions and a gradual loss of all awareness that *persons* are to fill these "roles" and perform these "functions."

Along with depersonalization goes an obscuring of the *purposes* which motivate cooperative enterprises and this is tragic because these purposes are precisely what bind together and unify the efforts of persons in a community. In the end, students and teachers alike live in the same world, confront the same problems and, if they are sensitive to the adventure in which they are commonly engaged, they will understand that it cannot succeed unless all involved are working together with some clear sense of what they are trying to achieve.

If we now reconsider our previous examples of students and teachers dyadically related, it is evident that they make no mention of the fact that both are involved in a common endeavor. In each of those cases, the two individuals were considered one at a time in juxtaposition to each other. Consequently, the teacher was made to appear as someone who has long been at work in some field of learning and who, as a result, has acquired knowledge and skill which are to be passed on, as it were, to the receptive student. The student is made to appear not as someone also confronted by the problems posed in the field of inquiry, but rather as one who waits patiently at home for the hunter to appear with the kill.

The error here lies in an utter failure to see that the two are or should be working together *simultaneously* confronting not only the problems of their field of study, but the wider human concerns — social, political, moral, religious — of contemporary life to which the field of study must be related. We fall into the same error if we start with the student and consider him all by himself as if he were not also engaged along with his teacher in the educational adventure. The student is then made to appear as one who comes with a ready-made conception of what his education should be and what is relevant for his life work, or he takes on the guise of someone entitled to be presented with a body of knowledge produced by teachers with a minimum effort on his part.

Here again the crucial third term which unites teachers and students in a purposeful community is lacking. Both alike confront the world and its mysteries; both alike have the task of overcoming ignorance; both alike have to contribute to the solving of the problems which beset modern society. The tasks to be done unite the student and his teacher, and the two face these tasks simultaneously and together.

The *unifying purpose* of the educational adventure takes them out of their dyadic relationship where their interests are made to conflict and where one of them determines the other in an asymmetrical way. They have, to be sure, different responsibilities in the achieving of their purpose; the teacher is more experienced in some respects and has the responsibility of making possible an exciting and imaginative learning situation, and the student, through active interest and concern, can aid in selecting and focusing relevant issues. But the important thing is their underlying consciousness that they are working together for the same goal — the development of personality and the conquest of ignorance.

Without this unifying goal in view, no community is possible. Without community no educational goals can be achieved.

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